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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W (JHUNTER)

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SUBJECT: KOROMA MAKES FIRST VISIT TO BRAZIL

REF: FREETOWN 321

¶1. President Koroma is currently enjoying the first ever Sierra Leonean state visit to Brazil after landing in Brasilia on August 18. Accompanied by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Information, and Agriculture, Koroma will meet with President Lula da Silva on August 19 to sign a Memorandum of Understanding and other agreements to cement the diplomatic relationship between the two countries and make way for the start of construction on a Sierra Leonean embassy. According a press statement, Koroma will also meet with the Presidents of the Senate, the House of Representatives, and the Supreme Court. He will also visit the Embrapa Agricultural Research Agency before leaving for Rio de Janeiro on August 20.

¶2. Koroma met with representatives from the 28 African diplomatic missions represented in Brasilia on August 18, and emphasized the strong historical and cultural bonds between Brazil and the African continent. The President told the representatives that Africa should seek closer ties to Brazil since "our people are the same." He then gave the diplomats a snapshot of the current state of affairs in Sierra Leone, highlighting the peaceful elections in 2007 and the "Agenda for Change" development strategy that prioritizes agriculture, energy, infrastructure, and social services. He also spoke about regional cooperation, focusing on the revitalization of the Mano River Union (MRU) and strengthened collaboration within ECOWAS and the AU (Note: In discussing the MRU, Koroma was careful to point out that they are supporting Guinea "to see her through this difficult time - and not shy away - but to ensure they meet their democratic commitments." End Note). He informed the group of the African Caucus of Finance Ministers and Bank Governors that Sierra Leone hosted (reftel) August 11-14. Koroma was warmly welcomed by the Dean of the African Diplomatic Corps, Thomas Bvuma from Zimbabwe, who also praised President Lula by saying "he makes our work easier by having a special interest in African affairs. We believe this special relationship reflects President Lula's genuine interest in Africa to develop partnership with our countries."

¶3. Comment: Sierra Leone has been working for some time to establish a diplomatic mission in Brazil, and a meeting with Foreign Minister Bangura some months ago revealed that the Brazilian government will be paying for its construction. Brazil does not have a representative based in Freetown, but we understand that this is also being considered. Areas of partnership and collaboration, particularly within the agricultural sector, will no doubt benefit Sierra Leone tremendously. End Comment.

PERRY